

**Your Watershed
by the Russian River Watershed Association**

Pick Up After Your Pet

Doodoo. Present. Berries. No matter the cutesy name given to the deposits left by our furry friends, pet waste is a nuisance and can be a significant environmental and health concern.

An encounter with pet waste is not only a quick way to ruin your favorite pair of shoes, but it can be a hazard to your health, as well. Dog waste contains organisms that can cause giardiasis, salmonellosis, toxocariasis, hookworm, and tapeworm, while organisms in cat waste can cause toxoplasmosis. Direct contact by touching pet waste, and indirect contact from insects, flies, or toys and balls that have contacted pet waste can carry and spread these organisms to other pets and people.

Aside from the ability to spread disease through contact, pet waste washed into our ditches, storm drains, creeks and ultimately the Russian River wreaks havoc on our environment. Pet waste decaying in our creeks and other water bodies causes eutrophication, a process in which algae grows rapidly. Rapid algae growth, also called an algal bloom, can suffocate a water body by blocking sunlight penetration, decreasing the amount of dissolved oxygen present in the water, and, depending on the type of algae, can release toxins into the water. Low light levels, low oxygen content, and increased toxins kill aquatic plants and animals. Eutrophication is especially hazardous during the summer since the added heat of the sun and lack of fresh water flowing in to our waterways can increase the magnitude of these problems.

So, what can you do? Help your community and the environment by using the following practices.

- Pick up your pet's waste on walks, in the parks, and at your home.
- Bring pet waste bags with you on outings so you are not caught unprepared. Newspaper bags and other leftover product bags come in handy.
- Throw pet waste in the trash. Do not put pet waste in the yard waste or recycling container.
- Do not flush cat waste or kitty litter down the toilet. Parasites in cat waste can survive the wastewater treatment process and end up in our waterways where they can harm sea otters and other aquatic life.
- It is generally acceptable to flush other pet wastes, but you should check with your utility department to make sure.
- Do not flush waste bags, puppy training pads, or newspapers down the toilet.

- Do not hose pet waste into the gutter. Use dry cleanup methods and throw the waste in the trash.

By doing your part to make sure you pick up after your pet, you are not only helping your community, but the environment as well. Thank you for helping to keep our Russian River watershed clean and healthy!

This article was authored by Corbin Johnson of Sonoma County Regional Parks and Eydie Tacata of the City of Rohnert Park on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.